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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2172
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 0157
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0556
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2608
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 2715
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 2549
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KUALA LUMPUR 001118

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MTS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [IS](#) [MY](#)

SUBJECT: GAZA REACTION: MALAYSIANS CONDEMN U.S. ALONG WITH
ISRAEL

Summary and Comment

1. (SBU) Malaysian political leaders and press have reacted with angry rhetoric to Israeli air strikes in Gaza and heavily criticized the U.S. together with Israel. The Malaysian government came out quickly to condemn the Israeli air strikes on Gaza, labeling this action as a "war crime" and calling for an immediate cease-fire, but refrained from explicitly highlighting U.S. support for Israel, at least in initial commentary. Political parties, including all three parties in the opposition coalition, were not as restrained and strongly criticized both the U.S. and Israel. The main Islamist opposition party organized a small and orderly demonstration at the Embassy on December 30, presented a letter holding the U.S. responsible for Israeli actions, and chanted "destroy Israel, destroy America." Malaysia's mainstream media, including television and print, has focused extensive coverage on the humanitarian situation in Gaza and emotive, critical commentary on Israel's actions, as well as criticism of U.S. statements blaming Hamas. Malaysia's government-affiliated Malay language press has been more strident in its anti-U.S. commentary. A December 30 editorial in the Malay language daily owned by the ruling UMNO party urged a boycott of U.S. products and withdrawal of deposits from U.S. banks, and suggested that support for "retaliation by militant Muslim groups" should not be ruled out.

2. (SBU) Comment: Although far from Malaysia's shores, Palestine is the single most compelling international issue for the Malaysian public, particularly among the Malay Muslim majority. Malaysia's response to the current Israel-Hamas conflict appears similar to the reaction we witnessed to the Israel-Hizbollah war in 2006 and the invasion of Lebanon, a reaction which featured sharp criticism of the U.S. and some demonstrations at the Embassy. As Israeli military actions in Gaza continue or escalate, Malaysian politicians will be tempted to pile on with further anti-U.S. rhetoric and possibly stage more public protest actions. The Malaysian government, however, has an interest in confining the Gaza reaction to the realm of rhetoric and not letting matters get out of hand. There have been no indications of anti-U.S. sentiment affecting American citizen security in Malaysia at this time. End Summary and Comment.

Malaysian Government Deplores Air Strikes

¶3. (U) Following initial reports of Israeli air strikes against Hamas, the Malaysian government quickly expressed concern over the humanitarian situation in Gaza and strongly condemned Israeli actions. Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi released a press statement on December 28 "deploring the disproportionate use of military power by Israel against the people of Gaza," urging the immediate restoration of the cease-fire by all concerned, and calling on the UN Security Council to take "necessary action." The Foreign Ministry issued a separate statement on December 28, which notes that "Malaysia considers this act (air strikes by Israel) as a war crime and a crime against humanity." The MFA statement also "urges all parties to exercise utmost restraint," and seek a negotiated, two-state solution.

Political Parties Criticize U.S. Alongside Israel -----

¶4. (U) Malaysia's political parties across the spectrum, including all three parties in the opposition coalition, spoke out to criticize both Israel and the United States. The Peoples Justice Party (PKR), led by Anwar Ibrahim, issued a December 29 statement referring to "Israel's barbaric air raid" and claiming that Israel's "state terrorism" would continue as long as its "Western allies" endorsed and supported such actions. Secretary General of the Democratic Action Party (DAP) Lim Guan Eng said the U.S. should stop its "blind support" for Israeli bombings and urged the Malaysian government to lodge an official protest with the Ambassador. Criticism of the U.S. was by no means limited to the

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opposition. Mukhriz Mahathir, son of Malaysia's former Prime Minister, and a leading candidate to head the UMNO party's Youth wing, issued a statement December 30 calling "upon the world's Muslims to be steadfast in rejecting this act of terror that has the tacit support of the United States."

Small Protest at Embassy -----

¶5. (U) On December 30, the opposition Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) led a vocal but orderly demonstration of some 150 to 250 people in front of the Embassy. The group, reportedly representing a coalition of 45 predominantly Muslim NGOs, presented a letter that condemned "yet another horrendous crime perpetrated by the Zionist regime of Israel on the occupied territory of Palestine." The letter also stated, "We hold the (U.S. government) responsible for the death, destructions and sufferings by the wanton acts (sic) of Tel Aviv." The demonstrators' chants in Malay included "destroy Israel" and "destroy America." The demonstrators dispersed peacefully after 45 minutes. The police presence was very visible and they provided good support to ensure Embassy security during the protest.

Media: Extensive Coverage of Gaza, Blame on U.S. -----

¶6. (U) Malaysia's mainstream media, including television and print, has focused extensive coverage on the humanitarian situation in Gaza and emotive, critical commentary on Israel's actions, as well as criticism of U.S. statements blaming Hamas. Nightly television news shows, Malaysians' primary source of news, have given top billing to the air strikes on Gaza. The New Straits Times, which routinely represents government views, ran an editorial on December 30, entitled, "Stop the Gore in Gaza." The editorial acknowledged that "no country would tolerate daily rocket attacks on its towns," but stated "there is no excuse for the indiscriminate and disproportionate slaughter (in Gaza)..." The editorial argued, "the Israeli assault has certainly dashed whatever faint hopes there have been that the inauguration of a new American president would provide a

fresh momentum for the peace process," criticized President-elect Obama for his "silence," and urged continued vigorous protests.

Malay Press More Strident, Calls for Anti-U.S. Action

17. (U) Malaysia's government-affiliated Malay language press has been more strident in its anti-U.S. commentary. The Utusan newspaper, the Malay language daily of the ruling UMNO party, used its December 29 editorial to blame the U.S. for Israel's actions and for failure to achieve Middle East peace. Utusan's December 30 editorial column "Whispers," written on a rotational basis by the paper's editors, went further and deemed Israel and the U.S. as the "real axis of evil," and called for action not just words to oppose the two countries. The short editorial urged a boycott of U.S. products, including films; withdrawal of deposits from U.S. banks; and suggested that support for militants' retaliation should not be ruled out: "We could even, if the need arises, support retaliatory action by militant Muslim groups after this, although it will be interpreted as terrorism. Who cares...." Berita Harian, another Malay daily associated indirectly with UMNO, in its December 29 editorial described the Palestinian people as "the victim of U.S. treachery."

KEITH